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SCHEEL'S STUDY OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

Unpretentious as is Dr. Scheel's little work,¹ it yet constitutes a step forward in the treatment of primitive Christianity. Like the larger work of Lowrie, *The Organization of the Primitive Church*, the present study is the working-out of Rudolf Sohm's ideas with regard to the character and organization of primitive Christian society. The term "primitive" is, however, by Scheel much more strictly used as applying only to the first generation of Christians. As sources of information for this period he regards only the Pauline Epistles as valid. Scheel's conclusions are somewhat as follows:

The Christian group was a unique creation, derived neither from the synagogue nor from Greek institutions. It was a community or corporation according to its own law. The word *ecclesia* does not necessarily connote a corporative community constitution. Rather by "church" was meant the people of God assembled in different places in the name of Jesus. The church of God is the assembly of those who through baptism have been freed from sin and are pledged to try to lead a holy life. In this effort they are helped by the Holy Spirit, the Divine Pneuma, which works only in the church. This fact gives the church group its exclusiveness; all those outside it are left helplessly to fight against the devils. Thus salvation was only in the church, which, furthermore, was conceived of as having existed before the creation of man. A newly baptized member was holy, but not perfect. Under the presupposition of sinlessness he progressed toward perfection, the charm of sin growing less and less. The church is thus composed of the holy ones, who, by believing, win justification from God. God out of grace forgives them their sins; they live in and by God's grace. They are all free, all bound together, all parts of one whole. If a man has qualities which enable him to act as leader in one place, he will be recognized as a leader elsewhere. Thus a local group may welcome a person from outside, and, of their own free will, follow his lead. Owing to this charismatic principle by which the church was run, there was no room for an election and community office resting on election. Objectively, grades of functions are possible, but fundamentally all members are of equal rank. Again, primitive Christianity was not democratic; all men were not brothers, though all church members were equal in rank because

¹ *Die Kirche im Urchristentum. Mit Durchblicken auf die Gegenwart.* (Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher. IV. Reihe, 20. Heft.) Von Otto Scheel. Tübingen: Mohr, 1912. 56 pages. M. o. 8o.

equally members of the body of Christ. But the functions are assigned by God, not by the church members who are thus unable to distribute the sovereignty of their body. Furthermore, it is a question of function and not office, so that while one man was supreme in one function, he might have to follow the lead of another who was supreme in some other function. There thus results a community controlled by no law; its actions are characterized by "pneumatic anarchy." In summary, Scheel characterizes primitive Christian society from the point of view of its government as a "pneumocracy."

In this study, Scheel's motive is largely a wish to discover in what regards the primitive Christians differed in their ideas and practices, both from their immediate successors, the Christians of the Catholic church, and from their remote successors, the Protestants. He is at pains constantly to bring out such similarities and differences. In so doing he is but following a long and honorable succession of scholars who have felt the fascination of this problem. Nevertheless, it is not from this point of view, as it seems to me, that the results of Scheel gain their chief importance. They have a fuller significance than merely to indicate the lines of cleavage between the stages of Christian development. They bear, if unconsciously, on the wider question of the distinctive characteristics of the Christian social group, as compared with the social groups formed for religious or other purposes in the society of the Roman Empire. By emphasizing the feeling of oneness that bound all Christians together, and the notion that only in the church was there salvation from devils, and the fact that God alone, not the local group, picked the spirit-filled leaders, Scheel has given us a picture of Christian society that helps to explain why Christianity and not some other oriental religion became the predominantly important social factor in the Roman Empire.

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THE HISTORY OF THE PAPACY

It is with a certain sense of disappointment that one lays down Mr. Beet's latest contribution to the history of the Papacy,¹ well written as it is. Handicapped by a narrowness of interest, of which perhaps he himself is unconscious, the author has given us a study of little more than one phase of the development of the Papacy. Directed by an

¹ *The Early Roman Episcopate to A.D. 84.* By William Ernest Beet. London: Charles H. Kelly, 1913. xii+332 pages. 3s. 6d. net.